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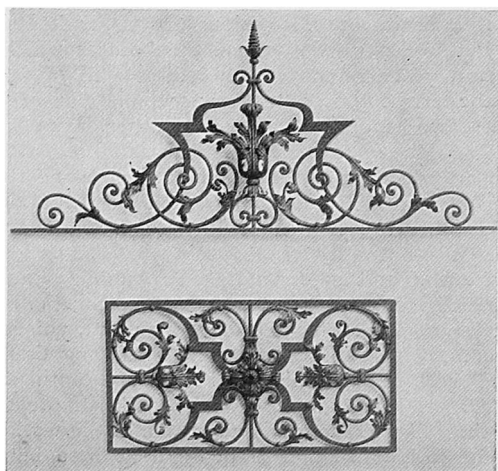
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WROUGHT-IRON WORK, BY ERNST MELAUN

ERNST MELAUN—A WORKER IN IRON

Biblical history informs us that Tubal-Cain, son of Lamech and Zillah, was "the instructor of every artificer in iron and brass," or, according to the revised version, "a forger of every cutting instrument of brass and iron." A perusal of the fourth chapter of Genesis will remind us, if we ever knew, or inform us, if we never did, that Tubal-Cain was but seven generations removed from Adam.

From those remote days to our own time the smith has been revered, and iron known and used by peoples of all lands.

For nearly five thousand years the great pyramid of Cheops has loomed up from the sands of the desert and cast its mighty shadow on the plain. A piece of iron from an inner masonry joint of this pyramid, now in the British Museum, shows us that iron was used in the early days of old Egypt.

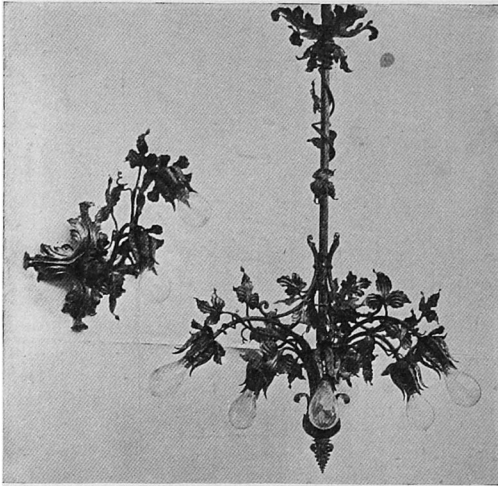
The Greeks and Romans deified the work of the smith in the person of Hephæstus, or Vulcan, the lame god of fire, who worked at his forge shaping the thunderbolts of Zeus or the armor of Mars.

In the days when the Golden Rule was unknown or practically unheeded, when man needed protection from his brother man, when might made right, there were grilled doors and barred windows.

When a new age expanded its white and holy wing, when the cathedrals gave external expression to man's joy in things high and pure, and portrayed his faith, his hope, his aspiration, the hammer of the smith resounded, teaching lessons of love and patience.

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when the church called the smith to aid in the decoration of her sanctuaries, work in ornamental wrought-iron attained its highest development. There was also noble work done in the three succeeding centuries. The metal-workers formed guilds, which exerted a wide and deep influence. These guilds, unlike the trade-unions, which the conditions of our own day have created, were formed for the advancement of art; a spirit of brotherly love existed which provided help for individuals when necessity required. It is pleasant to think of Peter Vischer, who, with his sons, labored so lovingly and so long on the shrine of "Sainted Sebald," and to whose foundry every prince and potentate who visited Nuremburg found his way, with Sebastian Cedenast helping Adam Kraft in his old age with his designs and their execution.

It is, then, to the cathedrals that we look for some of the finest examples of ornamental wrought-iron produced in the golden age of art metal-work. We find screens, canopies, grilles, and altar railings surpassingly beautiful in design



WROUGHT-IRON ELECTROLIERS, BY ERNST MELAUN

and workmanship, and details executed with wonderful love and care, such as the hinges of Notre Dame of Paris, so rare in their beauty that they are famous the world over.

After the few centuries of artistic eminence there was a decline in iron work, which was very rapid after iron began to be overlaid with architectural forms.

A few good imported pieces set something of a standard for early work in our own country, and in Colonial days there was work of considerable merit done. Then came a decadence.

During the present century, until about thirty years ago, there was almost no work in wrought-iron done, the demand being almost entirely for cast-iron. About thirty years ago there was something of

a revival, and in the few years since the Columbian Exhibition there has been much more demand for wrought-iron than there was in many preceding years.

While cast-iron has its place, its use, and its beauty, it cannot compare with wrought-iron. Iron when rolled or beaten has a fibrous texture which it does not possess when cast into ingots; then its malleability and its capacity for welding or uniting at a heat below melting point gives to wrought-iron great possibilities. In addition, wrought-iron is stamped with the individuality of the art craftsman. It is work at first hand, and portrays as clearly the feeling of the worker as does the picture or the statue.

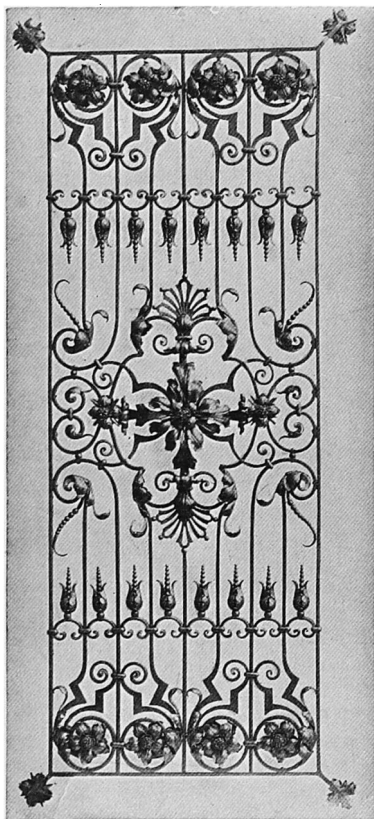
Lovers of art have bemoaned the extended use of cast-iron, claiming that the smiths have become little more than adjusters. However, the cunning of the smith is not entirely a thing of the past. A few forges are lighted, the stubborn iron is pliable as silken thread, and workmen bend and twist and weld it as deftly and skillfully as did the workers of the Renaissance.

Indianapolis may well be proud of claiming as a citizen one of these few workers, Mr. Ernst Melaun, of the firm of Melaun & Richards, an art workman unexcelled in his art.

WROUGHT-IRON SCREEN, BY ERNST MELAUN

In 1856 Ernst Melaun was born at Friedek, in Silesia, Austria. He received his high-school education in Moravia, at Neutitschein—Neutitschein, with its great castle and the allegiance paid to the lord of the castle reminding one of feudal times.

After completing his work at the high school, Mr. Melaun became a student at a craft school in Vienna, Austria. The Austrian govern-

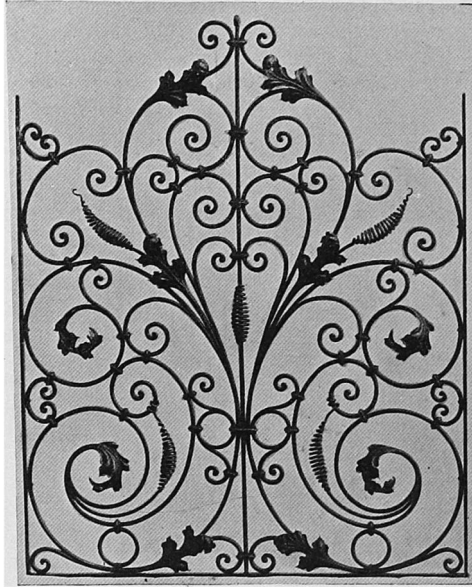


ment provides opportunity for its people to become proficient in the various trades, and it was at one of the government schools that Mr. Melaun received a thorough course of instruction in free-hand drawing and designing, and learned the art of using iron to produce beauty in ornament.

When he had acquired the full measure of knowledge that could be imparted at the craft school, Mr. Melaun, according to the custom of the times, became a journeyman, and took a four-years tour, working in all the cities and towns in northern and southern Germany and Denmark, where anything might be learned in the handling of iron. A few of the cities visited were Salisburg, Munich, Carlsruhe, Cologne, Hanover, Copenhagen, Hamburg, Berlin, Leipsic, Dresden, and Nuremberg. At the end of the four years Mr. Melaun had received all the training that the country could offer; he had become a skillful designer, and a "master workman" in the highest and best sense of the term.

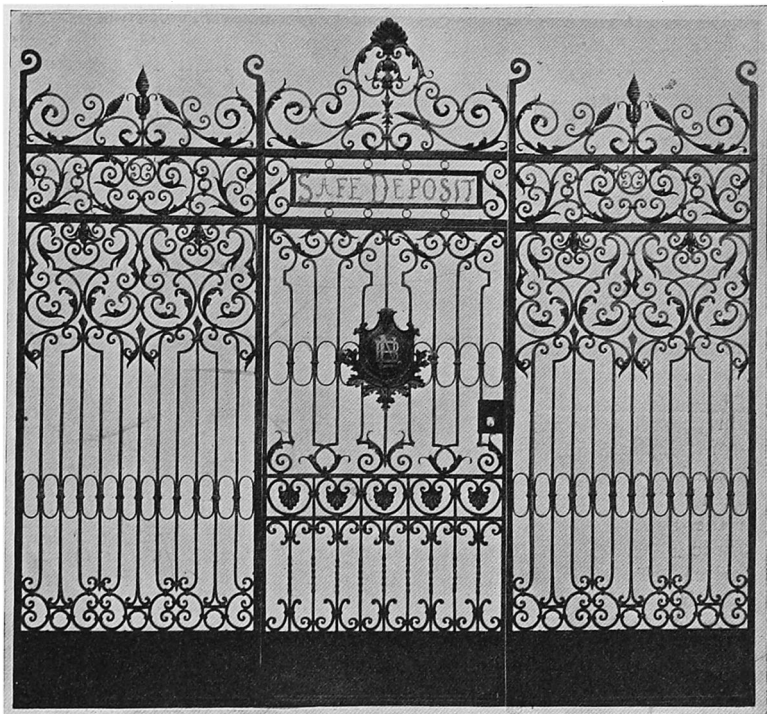
Then came what was a real trouble to the young workman, the five years demanded by his country for service in the army. No more designing, no more portraying of ideals through red-hot iron. The required military service changes the career of many young men, but Mr. Melaun's love for his work was so great that never for a moment did he think of a possibility of changing his life work.

At the close of the five years, thinking of military service that would be in the future demanded, and of a country that was likely to have a great art development, Mr. Melaun turned his face toward America, and reached Chicago in 1883. He then went to Milwaukee, and became manager of the Reliance Iron and Wire Works. After another short sojourn in Chicago, he went to Indianapolis in February of 1898. Mr. Melaun experienced the difficulty that comes to



WROUGHT-IRON WORK, BY ERNST MELAUN

almost all in becoming established in a new land. There was the difficulty of bringing his work before the public. Then for some time there was a limited demand for wrought-iron, many who were able to purchase not appreciating its superiority over cast-iron, and many others desiring great show for little money. Trade conditions never



WROUGHT-IRON GATE, BY ERNST MELAUN

had any effect upon the quality of Mr. Melaun's work. Every piece was always the very best that could be made. His integrity and artistic spirit finally won for him renown, his partnership with Mr. H. R. Richards has broadened his opportunities, and he is known throughout the country as one of the strongest workers in America.

A visit to the workshops on Shelby Street is a delight. In the exhibition room are grilles, screens, chandeliers, candlesticks, and numerous other articles, ready to be shipped to various places. In

the shops forges blaze, sparks fly, hammers ring, iron is being bended and twisted and rolled; great sheets of manila paper with designs lie across tables and benches; beautiful leaf and flower forms cut from paper hang on the walls; the busy master passes here and there, now explaining how some form might be more beautifully fashioned, again saying a word of praise, or teaching some young craftsman to work in the spirit and with the patience of the artisan of the "elder days of art," when

"Builders wrought with greatest
care
Each minute and unseen part;
For the gods see everywhere."

The illustrations show that Mr. Melaun thoughtfully considers the adaptation of material to purpose; they also show fine spacing, virility, and freedom of design and skillful execution.

There is surely a great future for the development of wrought-iron in America; there should be work done which would far surpass anything attained in the past.

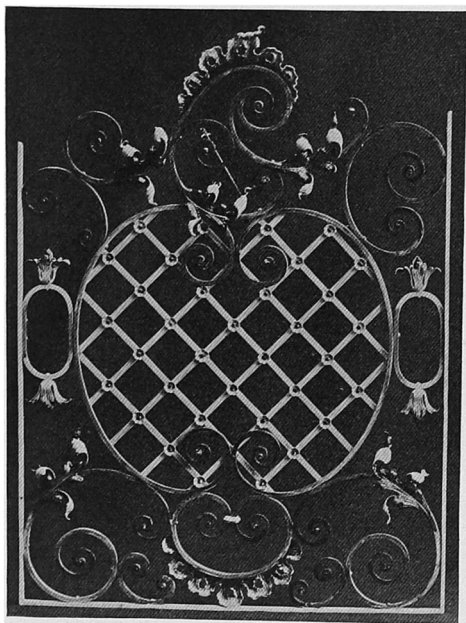
In the Middle Ages there was but a limited use for iron; the greatest opportunity afforded metal-workers was in fashioning the details of the cathedrals. Now we have whole city blocks of iron framework. The decoration of buildings has not kept pace with the advancement in construction. There is still too great adherence to the forms of the past. There are a few architects, however, who are teaching great lessons, who recognize that the spirit of the past belongs to us, while it is not necessary for us to use and reuse the forms in which it found embodiment. The conditions of our present civilization and of our own land demand a new architecture. In days of yore it was not necessary for accommodation to be provided in a



WROUGHT-IRON BRACKET, BY ERNST MELAUN

single building for many hundreds of business people, and a business block certainly needs to be of a different style than a temple. Buildings like the Sullivan buildings in Chicago, splendidly adapted to their purpose, and showing frank and fine use of materials, stand as monuments of creative skill and taste, and give us high hope for the architecture which is to be.

Wrought-iron will develop with architecture. It certainly jars our sense of the fitness of things to find that apparently solid columns



WROUGHT-IRON SCREEN, BY ERNST MELAUN

are hollow, that if by chance they are struck they give the sonorous ring of metal. This false use of iron makes it appear as a decidedly inferior material, and takes away the claim of a building for truth. If iron columns answer their purpose when hollow, and metal may be saved, well and good; but there is no necessity for making them appear other than they are. Iron needs painting to prevent corrosion, but there is no need of its being veined that we may be deceived into believing it to be marble, or sanded to produce the effect of stone.

Mr. Melaun has been trying some experiments in coloring grilles,

painting them simply to produce beautiful color effects, but with no thought of making iron imitate other material.

When architects become willing to use iron with avowed frankness, and when they recognize the great possibilities of iron for ornamental purposes, workers in iron will have opportunity for creative work hitherto not afforded. The new steel car will also surely give metal-workers an opportunity, while the extended use of iron for domestic purposes sets one thinking, the amount of iron consumed in bedsteads alone being something tremendous.

Among the metal-workers in the future development of the art, Ernst Melaun is likely to hold an honored place.

WILHELMENA SEEGMILLER.



FRAME IN WROUGHT-IRON
BY ERNST MELAUN